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April 13, 2014

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Wetlands mitigation a work

By CHRISTIE BLECK - Journal Staff Writer (cbleck@miningjournal.net) , The Mining

MARQUETTE - Can you recreate what nature made? It's not always

Mike Rotter, a Northern Michigan University student working on his

master's in biology, recently completed a McClellan Avenue extension

wetland mitigation project on the mitigated sites at Presque Isle and

In 2011, the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality issued a Water Resources Division permit that provided for the filling of 1.11

acres of wetlands associated with the McClellan extension, which ran

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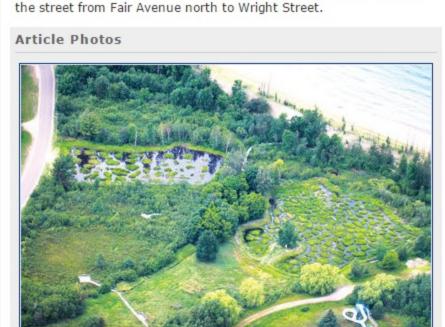
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This is an aeriel view of the Presque Isle mitigation sites.



The permit required the restoration of .23 acres of on-site wetlands and the restoration of 2.05 acres of off-site wetlands at Presque Isle.

Wetlands were restored with final plantings in 2012, Rotter said, with the sites to be monitored annually for 10 years beginning in 2013, and an annual report sent to the DEQ. Rotter's report has been accepted by the DEQ.

Rotter, with the help of Alex Graeff, an NMU student botanist. prepared a lengthy report detailing what was planted at the sites,

having taken on the project on a volunteer basis.

Rotter particularly expressed concerns over the larger Presque Isle mitigation sites. "The planning for the project was a textbook mitigation project, which

is you dig up the fill that was put there," Rotter said. "There was really nasty stuff in the ground they dug up. And then you reshape the

basin, and it collects water. "But unfortunately, I don't feel like the implementation of that plan followed the plan too well and because of that, they have a lot of management challenges at this site."

said. The city has to meet certain goals, such as providing native plant cover and wetland vegetation.

"Because they destroyed forested wetlands, these areas have to be

That's going to cause the city to invest more time at the site, Rotter

forested wetlands," Rotter said. He said hydrology estimates were incorrect, with shrubby vegetation

at the site killed by the water levels. The forbs - mainly sedges and some grasses - are doing OK, he said.

"It's hard to say what's going to take hold," Rotter said. However, Carl Lindquist, executive director of the Superior Watershed

Partnership, and Geri Grant, SWP senior planner, said they believe the project is a success. The partnership helped in the project's planning.

Lindquist acknowledged the mitigation is a lengthy process, with seeds germinating at different rates. Grant said the SWP worked with the DEQ on the plan, which included

performance goals as established by the DEQ. "You expect some things to come up right away," Grant said. "You

expect other things to come up later, especially with native seed."

Grant also said the SWP and the DEQ are pleased with the project's progress.

"The hydrology is behaving exactly as we planned it to," she said. Grant said the SWP anticipated invasive species at the site as well as deer browse. She pointed out management of invasive species and

more plantings will be considered, but letting the site get established on its own is the plan. Rotter said he believes the trajectory for the site is a monoculture of

mallards and little else. "And that's going to be a very intensive process, unless they get at it within the next year, to really try to contain these cattails to where

cattails, which if left unaddressed would attract red-winged blackbirds,

they're at in their mitigation sites," he said. At the McClellan site, Rotter said invasive species include non-native cattails, which are even more aggressive, as well as butterbur.

In his report, Rotter suggested black ash, white cedar and silver maple be planted because they might be able to cope with the shallower areas of the Presque Isle mitigation site.

Shrubs that could be planted include pussy willow, red-osier dogwood, alder, sweet gale and leatherleaf, he said.

Willows were removed from the Presque Isle site, but Rotter said they

were non-native willows. "I think one of the major issues we're facing on this site is that it's not as good bird habitat as it used to be, especially for migratory species, and I think adding these shrubby willows and alders would do a lot to provide a habitat matrix for stopping-over migrant bird species," Rotter

However, Lindquist said more than 140 species of birds have been seen at Presque Isle, many of those migratory.

"It has improved migratory bird habitat," he said of the project. Rotter said there already is an increase of wetland birds seen, but if

said.

said.

cattails take over, those birds won't visit the area. Also, he noted there has been an increase in dragonflies and other aquatic insects, but the entire system has to be considered. "The hope is if they meet the mitigation goals, there will be a fairly

self-perpetuating community that doesn't need active management," Rotter said. Greg Borzick, Marquette city engineer, said that although the permit

allows for the first two growing seasons to take place to demonstrate progress toward a self-sustaining wetland system before corrective measures are taken, the city is taking a proactive approach and will implement the recommendations provided in Rotter's report after one growing season. John Gustafson, environmental quality analyst with the Water

mitigation sites require adjustments to meet permit standards. He said the Presque Isle area is making acceptable progress toward

Resources Division in the DEQ's U.P. district office, said almost all

meeting the standards, although corrective actions - mostly involving control of invasive species - is necessary. "That's one of the main things the city's been working on," Gustafson

He also acknowledged trees and shrubs usually experience some mortality, which requires replanting, plus typical mitigation sites can take years to become fully established.

The city also is finalizing a contract with a local organization to control the potentially invasive cattails and establish vegetative test plots this spring and fall to determine what brushy and woody vegetation best adapts to Presque Isle conditions, said Borzick, who noted the work will be performed after the DEQ reviews and approves it.

ecosystems at the sites. "I think with the trajectory these are on right now, that all those are

Plants, animals and hydrology, Rotter said, all encompass the

kind of threatened without management changes to these areas," Rotter said. Grant, however, said the SWP looks forward to watching the Presque

be noted. "We want to maintain the plant diversity that was planned for this,"

Isle site this summer. For example, if cattails start to spread, that will

That's part of the consideration for management for what she called a "great restoration success story," but as with anything else, she said it

needs a little maintenance here and there, which is part of what the annual monitoring process will be about.

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